



As Beijing prepares to host the 2008 Olympic Games, construction is evident everywhere. So is air pollution. Left: The Five Friendlies will serve as mascots in the 2008 Games.



## China is emerging as one of the world's next superpowers.

ernment under which people cannot elect their national leaders. The Communist Party tightly controls political power and religious expression. It also forbids the Chinese news media from criticizing the government and national leaders.

### Stark Contrasts

The result is a society of stark contrasts. The Chinese people are freer than ever before to choose where they live, whom they marry, and what job they will do. At one time, all Chinese wore drab suits patterned after the one worn by Communist leader Mao Zedong (*mow zeh-dawng*). Now, people wear what they want. In cities, teenagers dress in blue jeans and T-shirts, play basketball and video games, and listen to their favorite pop singers from China, Taiwan, or South Korea.

China has more than 100 million Internet users, a number that grows each

year. But the government employs more than 30,000 censors to surf the Web and block out forbidden information.

Anyone who publicly criticizes government leaders still faces the possibility of being jailed. The Communist Party controls China's legal system. Official corruption is widespread. Quality of life in rural areas is much lower than in the cities. China has a new class of millionaires, while more than 500 million people make less than \$2 a day.

China's economic growth is astounding, but it has given rise to equally astounding air and water pollution. Air quality is horrific in many big cities, including Beijing. China is rushing to reduce pollution there before the Olympics begin in August 2008.

One reason for Beijing's air pollution is the huge construction boom. The lure of so many new jobs has

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### Words to Know

- **authoritarian:** favoring blind submission to government officials.
- **Communist:** a government based on state ownership of land and businesses. The Communist Party typically allows no opposition.
- **migrant:** a person who moves from one place to another, often in search of employment.